

To: Slape, Roger (IHS/NAV)[Roger.Slape@ihs.gov]
Cc: Brown, Rachael L (IHS/NAV)[Rachael.Brown@ihs.gov]; Reeves, Linda[Reeves.Linda@epa.gov]; Koehmstedt, Michael J. (IHS/NAV)[Michael.Koehmstedt@ihs.gov]; Magnuson, Jim P. (IHS/NAV)[Jim.Magnuson@ihs.gov]
From: McDonnell, David I. (IHS/NAV)
Sent: Fri 8/7/2015 10:09:50 PM
Subject: FW: NN News Release - Sheriff Order to Close Animas River
[removed.txt](#)
[President Begaye Demands U.S. EPA Release Information on Contaminants.pdf](#)

More info.

From: David Shoultz [mailto:davids@ntua.com]
Sent: Friday, August 07, 2015 4:02 PM
To: McDonnell, David I. (IHS/NAV); Helton, Sherri L. (IHS/NAV); Woodlee, Charles David (IHS/NAV)
Subject: FW: NN News Release - Sheriff Order to Close Animas River

From: Leeper, John [mailto:john.leeper@amecfw.com]
Sent: Friday, August 07, 2015 3:45 PM
To: Robinson, Roy; Boivin, Daniel; David Shoultz
Cc: Jason John; Rob Buss
Subject: FW: NN News Release - Sheriff Order to Close Animas River

From: Ray Benally Personal Email/Ex. 6
Sent: Friday, August 07, 2015 1:27 PM
To: Leeper, John
Cc: 'Jason John'; 'Najam Tariq'; 'Ray Benally'
Subject: NN News Release - Sheriff Order to Close Animas River

FYI

From: Ray Benally Personal Email/Ex. 6

Sent: Thursday, August 06, 2015 10:58 PM

To: 'Jason John'; 'Biddah Becker'; 'Najam Tariq'

Cc: 'Evangeline Thomas'; 'Ray Benally'

Subject: Animas River - Contaminated mine water from an old gold mine near Silverton, CO - LATEST UPDATES

Until the lab tests are completed, it is difficult to gauge the level of contamination & potential impact in the river.

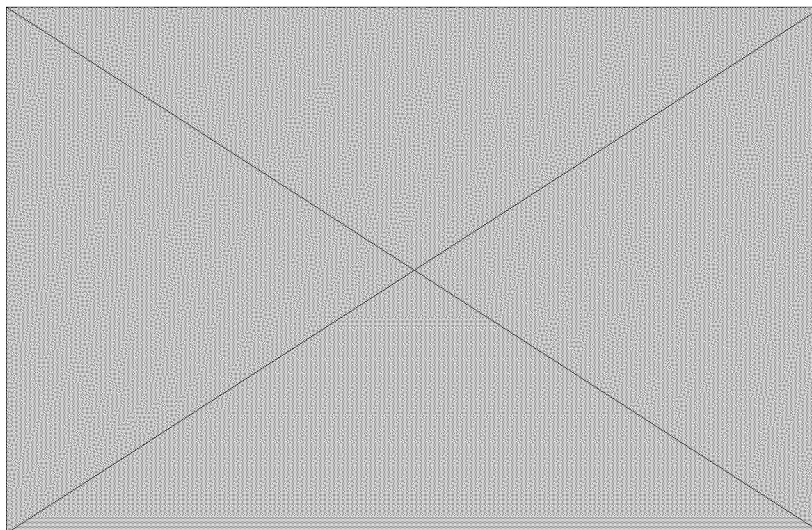
Catastrophe on the Animas

Toxic water floods river after EPA disaster at Gold King Mine in Silverton

By [Chase Olivarius-Mcallister](#) , [Mary Shinn](#) and [Shane Benjamin](#) Herald staff writers

Article Last Updated: Thursday, August 06, 2015 10:04 pm

Acidic wastewater from an abandoned mine above Silverton coursed its way through La Plata County on Thursday, turning the Animas River orange-brown, forcing the city of Durango to stop pumping raw water from the river, and persuading the sheriff to close the river to public use.



[Enlarge photo](#)

Jerry McBride/Durango Herald

Kayakers Dan Steaves, Eric Parker and David Farkas find themselves surrounded by the toxic

mine waste that begin flowing Wednesday into the Animas River from the Gold King Mine north of Silverton.



A call center has been set up for the public at 385-8700. Information is available on La Plata County's website at www.co.laplata.co.us/emergency, San Juan Basin Health Department's website at www.sjbhd.org, La Plata County Government Facebook page and San Juan Basin Health Department Facebook page.

What you need to know

1. Is the tap water safe to drink?

Yes. The city of Durango said water utility customers can consume it. All pumping of raw water from the Animas River was discontinued Wednesday. The Utilities Department continues to draw raw water from the Florida River, which was not affected by the release of waste water from the Gold King Mine.

2. Is the river closed to the public?

Yes; it is closed from the San Juan County line to the south end of the county at the Colorado-New Mexico border.

3. Are there mandatory water-use restrictions for city residents?

No. However, the water taken from the Florida River is not enough to meet the daily demands during the summer months and is usually supplemented with water from the Animas River. Because the city will not begin pumping water from the Animas River until notified that it is safe to do so, it is asking residents to immediately take steps to reduce their water usage and discontinue all outdoor watering until further notice.

4. Are the fish in the Animas in danger?

Colorado Parks and Wildlife have put fish in cages in four places in the river to monitor what happens to them.

Residents lined the banks of the Animas River on Thursday afternoon to watch the toxic wastewater as it flowed through Durango city limits. But the sludge slowed as it snaked its way through the oxbow in the Animas Valley, and the murk didn't arrive until after 8 p.m.

The accident occurred about 10:30 a.m. Wednesday at the Gold King Mine in San Juan County. A mining and safety team working on behalf of the Environmental Protection Agency triggered

the discharge, according to a news release issued by the EPA.

The EPA's team was working with heavy equipment to secure and consolidate a safe way to enter the mine and access contaminated water, said Richard Mylott, a spokesman with the EPA in Denver. The project was intended to pump and treat the water and reduce metal pollution flowing out of the mine into Cement Creek, he said.

The disaster released about 1 million gallons of acidic water containing sediment and metals flowing as an orange-colored discharge downstream through Cement Creek and into the Animas River.

River closure

The Animas River was closed to tubers, rafters and kayakers Thursday as the toxic plume made its way through Durango. The closure went into effect at 3 p.m., and it will remain in effect indefinitely until the river is deemed safe, said La Plata County Sheriff Sean Smith. Government officials aren't certain what toxins and at what levels toxins are present in the river, and, therefore, decided it was best to close the river to public use.

The closure, which applies to all flotation devices, is in effect for the entire stretch of the Animas River in La Plata County.

"This decision was made in the interest of public health after consultation with the Environmental Protection Agency, the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, San Juan Basin Health Department and representatives of the Southern Ute Indian Tribe," Smith said. "EPA test results of the Animas River are expected within 24-48 hours, and the order will be re-evaluated at that time."

City to conserve water

The city of Durango stopped pumping water out of the Animas River on Wednesday to prevent contaminating the city reservoir.

The Animas is an important secondary source of water for the city during the summer, and residents need to conserve as much water as possible over the next few days until the water is safe to use, said Steve Salka, the city's utilities director.

No formal water restrictions were issued.

At south City Market, Sean Lumen, who was hoisting bottled water onto emptied shelves, said if customers continued to buy water at Thursday's rate the store would run out sometime Friday.

At Albertsons, front-end manager Shelley Osborn said she initially thought people were buying up bottled water at an unusually rapid rate because it was on sale. Aaron Memro, grocery manager, estimated Albertsons sold two pallets of water Thursday – far more than usual.

During the emergency, Salka will not send raw water to Fort Lewis College for grounds use or Hillcrest Golf Course. The city also will not water any city-owned parks for the next three days to help conserve, he said.

On hot summer days, the city can use up to 9.2 million gallons a day. But the city can pump only 5.3 million gallons a day out of the Florida River.

The city reservoir was about 4.5 feet below capacity on Wednesday, Salka said.

“This couldn’t happen at a worse time for me, so I have to be really cautious,” he said.

Fish habitat

The EPA downplayed the potential effects on aquatic life, saying there is long-standing water-quality impairment issues associated with heavy metals in Cement Creek and upper portions of the Animas River. As a result, there are no fish populations in the Cement Creek watershed, and fish populations have historically been impaired for several miles downstream of Silverton in the Animas River, the release said.

Colorado Parks and Wildlife placed four cages containing fish in the Animas River to monitor what happens to them, said spokesman Joe Lewandowski. The cages were placed at 32nd Street, the fish hatchery, Dallabetta Park and the High Bridge.

“We’ll see if those fish survive,” Lewandowski said. “We’re also monitoring to make sure we don’t get infiltration into the hatchery, because that could be a problem.”

Peter Butler, co-coordinator of the Animas River Stakeholders Group and former chairman of the Colorado Water Quality Control Commission, said it remains to be seen whether the toxic metal concentrations flowing downriver will impact the few fish species living below Bakers Bridge. But if the plume does have a negative impact on aquatic life, Butler estimated that fish would die within hours of contact with the plume.

The contaminated water made its way to Bakers Bridge in La Plata County by Thursday morning and hit town by Thursday evening. **The material was expected cross the New Mexico state line between 4 and 5 a.m. Friday and arrive in Farmington on Friday evening.**

Farmington city officials shut down all water-supply intake pumps to avoid contamination and advised citizens to stay out of the river until the discoloration has passed.

Local officials asked all agricultural water users to shut off water intakes.

What’s in the water

Butler said the water being discharged from Gold King carried **high concentrations of iron, aluminum, cadmium, zinc and copper.**

While he didn't know precisely the metal levels in the water that surged out of Gold King on Wednesday, Butler said: "I'm sure they were really high."

Though Gold King has no record of emitting mercury, Butler said "when old mines open up like that, mercury sometimes drains out. Possibly, some other metals might have been released, like lead and arsenic. But there's no evidence of that at this point."

Butler said Colorado Division of Reclamation, Mining and Safety scientist Kirstin Brown had tested **pH levels** – the telltale measure of acidity in water – in the Animas River at Trimble Lane when the toxic plume arrived.

The pH level dropped from 7.8 to 5.8.

"That's a pretty big drop," Butler said.

Silverton does not use water from Cement Creek, so its water source remained uncontaminated, said William Tookey, the San Juan County administrator who met Thursday with EPA officials.

The Animas River was looking healthier about 24 hours after the discharge in Silverton, he said.

Gold King problems

This is not the first time there has been a water-related accident at one of the mines, but it did come as a surprise to the town, Tookey said.

He was not sure if the release would change attitudes toward the EPA in town. For years, some town residents and local officials have been opposed to a Superfund listing.

"Since it was the EPA that was responsible for this, it may make people less likely to be open to them," he said.

Butler said everyone invested in improving the Animas River's water quality wanted to get into Gold King, because, for years, it has been one of the two biggest contributors of heavy metal loads in the Animas Basin.

"They had a plan for handling the mine pool, but something went wrong, and it all came blowing out," Butler said.

EPA teams will be sampling and investigating downstream locations over the next several days to confirm the release has passed and poses no additional concerns for aquatic life or water users.

“This unfortunate incident underscores the very reason EPA and the state of Colorado are focused on addressing the environmental risks at abandoned mine sites,” said David Ostrander, director of EPA’s emergency response program in Denver. “We are thankful that the personnel working on this mine cleanup project were unharmed. EPA will be assessing downstream conditions to ensure any impacts and concerns are addressed, as necessary.”

Animas River closed to public after EPA dumps 1M gallons of waste

Updated: 08/06/2015 10:22 PM

By: Danielle Todesco, KOB Eyewitness News 4

SILVERTON, Colo. - A mine waste spill has spewed about a million gallons of orange-colored discharge into a tributary of the Animas River.

The Environmental Protection Agency said it triggered the release while using heavy machinery to investigate pollutants at the Gold King Mine north of Silverton.

The La Plata County Sheriff's Office has closed the river to the public.

“This decision was made in the interest of public health after consultation with the Environmental Protection Agency, the Colorado Department of Health and Environment, San Juan Basin Health Department and representatives of the Southern Ute Indian Tribe,” advised Sheriff Sean Smith. “This Order shall remain in effect until it is determined that the river is safe. **EPA test results of the Animas River are expected within 24-48 hours, and the Order will be re-evaluated at that time.**”

Environmental authorities are scrambling to assess damage from the leak, caused when a plug blew at the Gold King Mine near Silverton. **Earlier today, officials say that drinking water is not affected and that the spill is not harmful to humans. The primary pollutants are iron and zinc.**

The EPA says that about 1 million gallons of mine waste spewed into Cement Creek, which feeds the Animas.

The Colorado Department of Public Health and the Environment says that there are no fish populations in the Cement Creek watershed because of longstanding water quality impairment.

The Bureau of Reclamation will release more water from the Navajo Dam in order to dilute the merger from the Animas into the San Juan River in Farmington, NM.

City of Farmington officials are urging residents to stay out of the river and to keep live

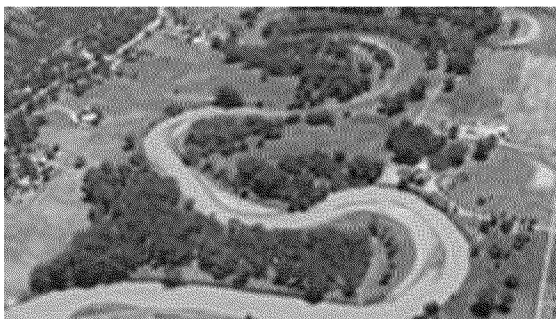
stock from drinking the water if discoloration is present.

Farmington's drinking water is unaffected, city officials said.

The New Mexico Governor's office criticized how the EPA released information about the spill. In fact, her office learned about the spill from the Southern Ute Tribe, according to the governor's spokesperson Chris Sanchez.

"The Governor is disturbed by the lack of information provided by the EPA to our environmental agencies in New Mexico and strongly believes that people in our communities downstream deserve to have all the information about this situation," Sanchez said in a statement.

Photo: La Plata County Sheriff's Office



Animas River closing following contaminated water spill from Gold King Mine

Deb Stanley, Oscar Contreras

11:57 AM, Aug 6, 2015



The Animas River is closing indefinitely following an accidental spill of more than one million gallons of contaminated water from the Gold King mine in southwestern Colorado, a La Plata County Sheriff told 7NEWS.

All watercraft including canoes, kayaks, tubes, rafts and other flotation devices from the north County line (San Juan County) to the South County line (Colorado/New Mexico state line) will not be allowed until further notice, La Plata County Sheriff Sean Smith said.

All watercraft within the location stated above must be removed, Smith added.

"This decision was made in the interest of public health after consultations with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Colorado Department of Health and Environment, San Juan Basin Health Department and representatives of the Southern Ute Indian Tribe," said Smith.

Smith said in a statement that EPA test results are expected within the next 24 to 48 hours, at

which point the order will be re-evaluated.

The acidic mine water was traveling down the Animas River and was expected to hit the city limits of Durango at approximately 3 p.m. on Thursday.

"The EPA and State Division of Reclamation, Mining and Safety team working to investigate and address contamination at the Gold King Mine in San Juan County, Colo. unexpectedly triggered a large release of mine waste water into the upper portions of Cement Creek," according to a news release from the La Plata County Office of Emergency Management. "Initial estimates are that the release contained approximately 1 million gallons of water that was held behind unconsolidated debris near an abandoned mine portal."

County officials said while there were several workers at the mine at the time of the breach, no one was hurt.

However, they are asking that fishermen, rafters, boaters and other recreational users of the Animas River to avoid contact with the water until the mine water passes.

County officials said the acidic mine water contains high levels of sediment and metals.

"EPA teams are conducting sampling and visual observations today and will be monitoring river conditions over the next several days," county officials said. "The water associated with the release is obvious and highly discolored."

San Juan Corp., property owner of the Golden King Mine released the following statement:

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, operating under an access agreement obtained from the owner of the Gold King Mine, had begun an investigation regarding the source of contaminated water at the Gold King Mine last year. Upon suspending work last year, the USEPA backfilled the portal to the mine. On August 5th, 2015, while the USEPA was removing the backfill from the portal to the Gold King Mine to continue its investigation this year, the plug blew out releasing contaminated water behind the backfill into the Animas River.

Residents with questions about the water may call 970-385-8700.

The Gold King Mine is just outside Silverton. The mine started operations in 1887. According to NarrowGauge.org, [the Gold King](#) shipped more than \$8 million in ore during its operations.

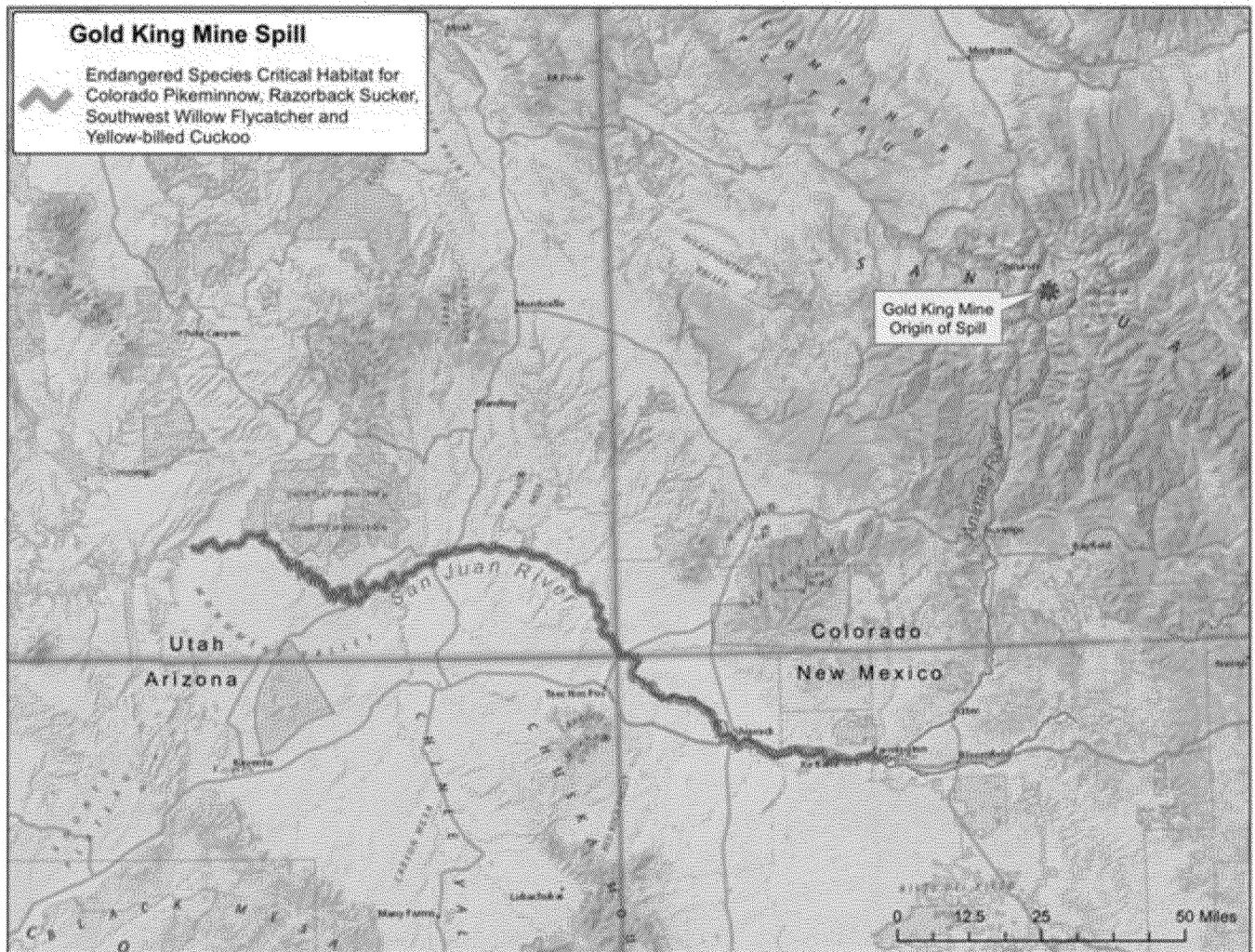
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Huge mine spill fouls Colorado's Animas River, raising endangered species and public health concerns

Posted on August 6, 2015 by Bob Berwyn

Conservation groups decry EPA's lax response



A map provided by the Center for Biological Diversity traces the path of a spill from the Gold King Mine via Cement Creek to the Animas and San Juan rivers.

Staff Report

FRISCO — Conservation advocates say the EPA's cavalier response to a toxic spill from a mine near Silverton, Colorado shows a disregard for potential impacts to wildlife downstream of the spill.

According to the EPA, a state and federal remediation team Wednesday morning unexpectedly triggered the spill of mine waste water into Cement Creek. As much as 1 million gallons of

contaminated water that was contained behind a makeshift dam was released into the creek. The water is tainted by toxic heavy metals and is now flowing downstream in the Animas River toward Durango.

In a statement, the EPA said that, due to longstanding water quality impairment associated with heavy metals there are no fish populations in the Cement Creek watershed and populations in the Animas River have historically been impaired for several miles downstream of Silverton. The agency will be monitoring and sampling water in the Animas River farther downstream to assess the impacts.

The Animas River was closed Thursday to boaters and other users because of potential health risks, according to [the Durango Herald](#), which also reported that the city has shut down its intakes from the Animas River, while Colorado Parks and Wildlife is trying to determine if the water is toxic to fish by placing caged trout at different points in the stream.

The Center for Biological Diversity pointed out that the Animas flows into the San Juan River, which includes habitat for several species of federally endangered fish and birds. Many of these, including razorback suckers and Colorado pikeminnow, are already afflicted by exposure to toxic compounds, such as selenium and mercury, associated with mine waste.

“The fact that fish populations in the upper Animas have already been decimated by mining pollution offers no comfort to concerns about pollution impacts farther downstream,” said CBD’s Taylor McKinnon.

“Endangered species downstream of this spill are already afflicted by same toxic compounds like mercury and selenium that may be in this waste,” said McKinnon. “These species are hanging by a thread, and every new bit of toxic exposure makes a bad situation worse. EPA’s downplaying of potential impacts is troubling and raises deeper questions about the thoroughness of its mine-reclamation efforts.”

The Center will seek records from the federal agency about this week’s spill under the Freedom of Information Act. It will scrutinize the EPA’s compliance with the Endangered Species Act and other laws in connection with potential impacts to endangered species from mine-reclamation programs and disasters.

“This unfortunate incident underscores the very reason EPA and the State of Colorado are focused on addressing the environmental risks at abandoned mine sites,” said David Ostrander, director of EPA’s emergency response program in Denver. “We are thankful that the personnel working on this mine cleanup project were unharmed. EPA will be assessing downstream conditions to ensure any impacts and concerns are addressed, as necessary.”



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